

VII. 2003 - 2008 ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Action Plan identifies specific actions the state will take during 2003-2008 to improve the state's outdoor recreational resources. The primary state agencies involved will include the Division of Coastal Management, Division of Water Quality, Division of Parks and Recreation, Division of Forest Resources, and the Wildlife Resources Commission. Because of the changing priorities and limited resources available to many public recreation agencies, the completion dates presented herein are, by necessity, approximations.

The actions presented in this chapter are organized according to the five issue categories discussed in Chapter I: improving outdoor recreational resources and services; conserving natural resources; inadequate funding; effective partnerships; and the status of the state parks system.

IMPROVED OUTDOOR RECREATION RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Goal: Provide improved outdoor recreation resources and services to meet the needs of a growing and changing population.

Actions

- The Division of Parks and Recreation (DPR) will set priorities for funding acquisition and development of LWCF outdoor recreation projects based on how projects address issues and needs identified in the SCORP.
- The DPR will continue to offer interpretation and education programs at staffed state parks and recreation areas.
- The DPR will provide technical assistance to agencies and organizations in the areas of trail corridor planning, design, construction, maintenance, management, and funding.
- The DPR will conduct educational workshops on trails.
- The DPR will use the Open Project Selection Process as a formal and objective method of selecting acquisition and development projects to be funded by LWCF.
- The DPR will maintain a website that provides outdoor recreation information about the state parks system. Other state agencies will also maintain such websites.
- The DPR will continue to promote and hold special events in state parks such as Civilian Conservation Corps Day at Hanging Rock, Civil War re-enactments at Fort Macon and

Indian Heritage Week at Pettigrew.

- The DPR will continue to administer grants, encourage individuals and groups to volunteer, and recognize volunteers for their contributions.
- The DPR will inventory and assess existing trails, create a data base of existing and proposed trails and develop a comprehensive N.C. Trails System Plan.
- The N.C. Division of Travel and Tourism will continue to promote special events held by local governments such as Riverfest in Wilmington, Lazy Daze in Cary, and Artsposure in Raleigh.
- The N.C. Division of Travel and Tourism will continue to answer inquiries and provide information regarding the state's outdoor recreation areas and services.
- The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) will continue to make grants to state agencies and local governments to provide new capital improvements, repairs and renovation of areas and facilities.
- The Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) will construct new boating and fishing access areas and renovate older ramps as resources allow.
- The WRC will conduct Carolina Anglers Teach Children How (CATCH) clinics annually throughout the state.
- The WRC will hold environmental education programs at its Pisgah Environmental Education Center near Brevard.
- The WRC will hold annual youth hunts.
- The N.C. DOT's Bicycle Program will undertake state bikeway system improvement projects such as signs, maps, and road improvements.
- Recreation Resources Services (RRS) will publish an annual study of municipal and county park and recreation services and other studies as resources allow.
- Consulting services will be offered to the public and private sectors through Recreation Resources Services, contingent upon renewal of the contract and availability of funds.
- RRS and the N.C. Recreation and Park Society will share information and provide training through workshops dealing with topics such as low maintenance and vandal-resistant facility design, swimming pool maintenance, and grant applications.

CONSERVING NATURAL RESOURCES

Goal: Preserve, maintain, and promote the wise use of North Carolina' s unique natural and scientific environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

Actions

- The Department of Environment and Natural Resources will develop a statewide conservation plan, *One North Carolina Naturally*.
- The Division of Water Quality (DWQ) will revise its basin-wide management plans in order to communicate to policy makers, the regulated community, and the general public the state' s rationale, approaches, and long-term strategies for its river basins.
- The Division of Water Quality will continue to administer the Water Supply Watershed Protection Program so as to prevent pollutants from entering drinking water supplies.
- The Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) will continue making grants to protect and conserve the state's waters by planning for and acquiring riparian buffers and greenways for environmental, educational and recreation benefits.
- The Natural Heritage Trust Fund (NHTF) will continue to fund grants to purchase natural areas and wildlife habitats.
- The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) will continue to make grants to state agencies and local governments to acquire outdoor recreation lands.
- The Natural Heritage Program (NHP) will continue to collect information about the occurrences and distribution of the rarest plants and animals and the highest quality natural communities of the state.
- The NHP will continue to provide landowners, agencies, corporations, scientists and others with information needed for effective planning, research, and protection efforts.
- The NHP will continue to seek grants and contracts to undertake field studies, particularly for ongoing county inventories.
- The NHP will compile information collected in the Biological and Conservation Database and continue to update existing information.
- The NHP will review plans for roads and bridges, airports, wastewater treatment plants, sewer lines, timber sales, dredging, and many other public and private construction and development projects to identify rare species and priority natural areas that might be affected by proposed projects so negative effects can be reduced or eliminated.

- The NHP will continue to assist landowners with appropriate protection measures through informing the landowners of the high ecological value of the site, providing useful information on protection and management needs, and discussing protection options.
- The NHP will continue to encourage landowners to dedicate property as a state nature preserve so as to preserve its natural values permanently.
- The NHP will continue to provide landowners with management advice and assistance to ensure that natural areas are successfully managed.
- The NHP will prepare a Biennial Protection Plan to inform the governor, the General Assembly, and the public of program activities planned.
- The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation (DPR) will seek to expand the State Parks System according to priorities identified in the Division's expansion plan and Systemwide Plan.
- The DPR will complete natural resources management plans for state park units as resources allow.
- The DPR will continue to work with other governmental agencies and non-profit organizations to protect more of the state's natural heritage.
- The N.C. Division of Water Resources will continue the Stream Watch Program, including publication of a quarterly newsletter, to promote protection and enhancement of water quality and streamside habitat.
- The Natural Heritage Program, Wildlife Resources Commission, and Division of Forest Resources will continue training in prescribed burning methods for fire-dependent ecosystems.
- The Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) will train educators annually through NC WILD and NC CATCH environmental education workshops.
- The WRC will continue to produce *Wildlife in North Carolina*, an educational magazine that promotes boating and hunting safety and the conservation of wildlife resources.
- The WRC will continue to incorporate agency environmental education programs into existing youth programs of other organizations.
- The WRC will continue to incorporate its NC CATCH and NC WILD programs into the school system and youth group curricula.
- The Department of Environment and Natural Resources will seek implementation of

recommendations contained in the Catawba River Resources Plan.

- The Division of Coastal Management will continue to manage estuarine research reserve sites for preservation, research, education, and recreation.
- The Division of Forest Resources will manage its educational state forests to promote a better understanding of the value of forests.

INADEQUATE FUNDING

Goal: Sufficient funds to adequately meet the demand for quality recreational opportunities.

Actions

- The Division of Parks and Recreation will continue to request funding of positions needed to establish adequate staffing levels at state park units.
- The DPR will make new Land and Water Conservation Fund grants to local governments and state parks to address SCORP needs and continue to monitor post-completion responsibilities on old grants. Grant proposals directed toward SCORP needs will have a high priority for funding through the OPSP process.
- The DPR will make grants to local governments from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, supplementing local dollars to provide additional public recreational opportunities.
- The Department of Environment and Natural Resources will seek continued funding of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the Clean Water Management Trust Fund and the Natural Heritage Trust Fund to promote a stable funding source for outdoor recreation acquisition and development and conservation purposes.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Goal: Develop a unified constituency that will work to improve outdoor recreational resources in the future.

Actions

- The N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources will cooperate with seven states, several federal agencies, industry, environmental organizations, academia, and other interested parties in the Southern Appalachian Mountains Initiative. The SAMI will deal with regional issues of air quality and its effects on resources in the Southern

Appalachians.

- The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission will continue efforts to expand Commission-managed acreage through cooperative efforts with Ducks Unlimited, the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, the Nature Conservancy, and other private and government agencies.
- The DENR will organize and promote Big Sweep annually, a day in which volunteers are mobilized to collect refuse at state parks, lakes, and trails.
- The DENR will cooperate with the Corps of Engineers during the revising of the reservoir master plans.
- The Division of Parks and Recreation will encourage state and federal agencies to consider SCORP-identified needs when planning for additional recreational facilities and areas.
- The DPR will continue to inspect LWCF projects to ensure local government compliance with federal regulations.
- The DPR, through Recreation Resources Service, will provide LWCF workshops for local governments interested in seeking funding assistance.
- The DPR will continue to cooperate with and support efforts of numerous federal, state, and local governments and volunteer trail organizations as they develop trails.
- The Natural Heritage Program will cooperate with academicians and private and agency biologists in the collection and sharing of information.
- The NHP will continue to cooperate with the Wildlife Resources Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Agriculture, and other agencies to assist in the protection of endangered species.
- The NHP will continue to maintain the N.C. Registry of Natural Heritage Areas to encourage landowners to make voluntary, non-binding commitments to preserve their ecologically significant sites.
- The Division of Water Resources will work with TVA and the USFS concerning lake level management and in stream flows needed to enhance recreational opportunities.
- The Division of Coastal Management will continue to encourage and assist local governments in the establishment of public accesses to beaches, sounds, and tidal creeks.
- The DOT Bicycle Program will assist local governments with the development of bicycle programs and the construction of bicycle facilities.

- RRS will continue to conduct statewide training sessions via UNC' s concert system.

STATUS OF THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM

Goal: Address needs identified in the systemwide plan' s evaluation of the North Carolina State Parks System.

Actions

The actions for improving the state parks system are based on an evaluation of the current system, trends affecting the system, an evaluation of the significant natural resources in North Carolina, and the public' s need for recreational resources as described in the *Systemwide Plan of the North Carolina State Parks System*. The Systemwide Plan is incorporated as a part of this SCORP.

The actions to be undertaken by the Division of Parks and Recreation are grouped as follows: interpretation and education; natural and cultural resource protection; park operations; capital improvements; planning; community outreach and public support; and system expansion.

Interpretation and Education

- Develop the structure and by-laws for an Interpretation & Education (I & E) Council. After the I & E Council is operational, its primary task will be to develop a strategic plan for Interpretation and Education.
- Seek to establish positions needed to implement Phase II of the state parks interpretation and education capital expansion program.
- Complete the current capital improvement interpretation and education projects for state park units.
- Seek to establish a permanent position for a Division Environmental Educator who can assist the I & E Specialists in completing and revising the state park Environmental Education Learning Experiences (EELEs).
- Revise and expand the basic EELEs for the operational units where resources allow.
NOTE: A basic EELE contains only three activities, whereas a complete EELE has nine or more activities that span several grade levels and learning abilities.
- Develop a complete EELE for Lumber River and Gorges state parks.
- Place field-tested EELE activities on the Division's web site so that educators can search a database and download activities to meet the learning needs of their students.

- Develop a new database to collect and compile the I & E statistics that have been requested by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. After the software and database have been tested and refined by the I & E Specialists, rangers should be trained to use the new system and input their own data directly into the database.
- Begin training park staff in methods of interpretive planning. Interpretive programs should correspond with the park's primary interpretive themes. In addition, interpretive plans will be created for new park facilities such as interpretive centers, nature trails, amphitheaters, accessible fishing piers, etc., as resources allow.
- Develop a systematic, coordinated approach for disseminating information about the I & E programs, exhibits and EELEs to teachers, scout leaders and other appropriate individuals and conduct I & E training as resources allow.

Natural and Cultural Resource Protection — Stewardship

- Develop resource management guidelines for additional high priority issues.
- Expand prescribed burning in fire adapted communities in Piedmont and mountain parks.
- Develop exotic plant control plans for high priority projects.
- Develop nuisance animal management plans at parks with nuisance raccoons and wild boar.

Natural and Cultural Resource Protection — Scientific Research

- Make significant progress towards the completion of up-to-date park-specific inventories to determine the presence and condition of plants and animal species, soils, water and air quality and natural community types.
- Develop vegetation maps for the ten highest priority parks in a GIS format.
- Develop and fund long-term cooperative research agreements with research institutions for high priority research needs.
- Implement park-specific long-term biological monitoring programs to assess changes in the condition of natural resources at the highest priority parks.

Natural and Cultural Resource Protection — Landscape Planning

- Continue to develop cooperative relationships with local agencies and communities so that park protection is considered and addressed in local development plans.
- Develop landscape-level plans to address the highest priority water quality problems at individual parks and begin implementation.
- Incorporate landscape-level considerations in park acquisition planning, including linkage

to other public and privately protected areas and trails, and the provision of wildlife corridors.

Natural and Cultural Resource Protection —Environmental Review and Compliance

- Review park construction projects and recommend changes if needed to ensure minimal environmental impact and compliance with applicable environmental laws and regulations.
- Develop guidelines that provide design and construction standards suitable for park construction projects.
- Improve communication between construction and resource management staff and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the environmental review process. Conduct annual meetings of compliance and construction project staff to ensure that all parties are up to date on current compliance laws and regulations and the construction process.
- Create existing and planned facility GIS datasets for use in environmental compliance and park planning efforts.

Land Acquisition

- Use LWCF assistance to acquire additional high priority state park lands.
- Address 40 percent of identified land acquisition needs for the state parks system.
- Determine extent of unknown boundaries and locate 50 percent of them.
- Convert 50 percent of the closed property database to a GIS format.

Park Operations

- Improve visitor services by allocating sufficient professional staff to serve and protect park visitors during all operating hours.
- Seek to increase annual maintenance funds to a reasonable percentage of physical accounts value in order to adequately maintain park facilities.
- Increase staff training as resources allow to improve productivity and safety in the workplace.
- Evaluate using cooperating associations to increase park programs and revenues.
- Develop and adopt disaster preparedness guidelines in order to provide improved search and rescue procedures.
- Increase district operations and technical support staff to improve field staff training,

technical expertise and organizing projects involving staff from several parks, such as controlled burns.

Capital Improvements

- Reduce the capital improvement project needs list through funding from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.
- Expand handicap accessibility to state park facilities. All new projects will provide accessibility in accordance with the standards of the American Disabilities Act. Pursue multiple funding opportunities for modifications to existing facilities.
- Continue to use the Project Evaluation Program (PEP) to establish priorities for funding capital improvement projects.
- Develop standardized designs for washhouses and implement other standard designs.
- Pursue new technologies appropriate for state parks. Explore using recycled materials, low waste systems, renewable energy and energy savings. Use environmentally friendly materials.

Planning

- Continue to use the general management planning process to develop capital improvement and land acquisition plans for each park unit that represents a consensus in DPR.
- Complete general management plans that have not been approved. Initiate general management plans for state parks system units that do not have general management plans (Carolina Beach, Cliffs of the Neuse, Jones Lake and Lake Waccamaw State Parks and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area).
- Continue to automate mapping of state parks system units using a geographic information system (GIS) to locate buildings, visitor facilities, roads and trails. Complete half the park system units.
- Study and poll park visitors to determine the length of an average visit to a state park, the average expenditures a park visitor makes during a trip to a state park and visitor preferences about recreational park facilities and policies.
- Update the Systemwide Plan for the State Parks System.
- Incorporate park advisory committee views and comments into planning at individual park units. Also, consider the impact of outside activities on the integrity of parks as well as the park's impact on adjacent properties.

- Add two planners to the Division staff to insure that capital improvement and land acquisition plans remain up to date.

Public Awareness and Involvement

- *Yours to Discover Brochure* – Enlarge and update the Division's systemwide *Yours to Discover* brochure with the goal of publishing the brochure in a book format that will allow more detail on each park.
- General Information Brochures – Continue to publish and update park general information brochures as resources allow.
- The Steward – Continue the Division's monthly newsletter, *The Steward*, and publish the newsletter electronically.
- Website – Continue to develop and enhance the Division's website to include pages on all Division programs, a kid's page and other items of interest.
- Video – Seek funding to produce a brief informational video on the Division and its program.
- Marketing – Work with other DENR natural resource agencies to market the Department's agencies and to promote the resources of the Division.
- Park advisory committees will continue to communicate with and support the park superintendent by fulfilling their basic responsibilities.
- State park volunteers will continue to be trained to work independently in long-term positions to allow state park units to operate more efficiently.

System Expansion

- Expand Lake James State Park to the north shore and operate as a state recreation area, offering water-based recreational activities.
- Seek to expand the State Parks System using a ranked master list of potential state parks, state natural areas, state recreation areas and state rivers.
- Pursue the establishment of two new state rivers which add significantly to diversity and resource theme representation in the state parks system.
- Pursue the establishment of at least two state natural areas which add significantly to diversity and resource theme representation in the state parks system.
- Pursue the establishment of two state parks that will add significantly to diversity and

resource theme representation in the state parks system.

- Promote local government utilization of PARTF matching grants to purchase areas of local or regional significance as identified in the natural heritage program inventory.
- Meet/consult with regional non-profit land trusts for purposes of information exchange and setting priorities for land acquisition.